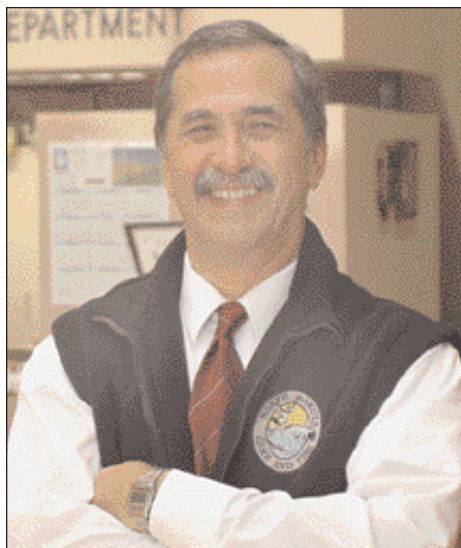




MATTERS OF OPINION



Terry Steinwand
Director

The fishing so far this summer has been worth bragging about on many North Dakota waters. In part, this angling success is the fruit of a lot of hard work from dedicated fisheries professionals. It's also a reward for some visionaries who, more than a half-century ago, put into play the Dingell-Johnson Act, giving states portions of excise taxes on fishing rods and other fishing gear. This was further enhanced in the mid-1980s with the Wallop-Breaux Act, which collects excise taxes on boats, motors and, subsequently, a portion of the federal boat gas tax.

Together, these two bills constitute the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration account. These federal funds are distributed via a formula that accounts for population, water bodies and fishing license sales in a given state – a good example of a “user pay” scenario. They provide the base for fisheries management, boat ramps and associated facilities, and many other activities that enhance the resource or provide access to it. Without this consistent source of funding, fishing and many of its associated amenities, likely wouldn't be what it is today.

While I'm in “water mode,” the issue of waterfowl comes to mind. As we know, North Dakota's Prairie Pothole Region has few rivals in North America in terms of producing ducks. As it is with Sport Fish Restoration funding, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and its products have contributed greatly to either preserving or restoring much of the habitat that makes waterfowl production possible. Millions of dollars have been invested in North Dakota for that purpose and I hope to see it continue.

I've been nominated as the Central Flyway representative for the North American Wetlands Conservation Council, and am awaiting confirmation by the Secretary of Interior. John Cooper, current representative and secretary of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks, and Ken Sambor, recently retired North Dakota Game and Fish Department employee, did a great job of safeguarding habitat across the nation, but also securing funding for North Dakota to enhance our capabilities to produce waterfowl. Randy Kreil, Department wildlife

division chief, also represents us on the NAWMP planning committee.

While we're a couple months away from major hunting seasons, it's never too early to start planning. Hopefully, everyone submitted their deer gun applications on time – and good luck on receiving your first choice.

Opportunities abound for deer hunters across the state. There are slight decreases in available licenses in some areas, but that just means we're getting closer to management goals.

It's good news that our deer and elk herds remain free of chronic wasting disease. The final test results of last year's animals arrived in June, and once again no CWD was detected. Now is not the time to relax, however. Continued disease testing and adherence to rules and regulations regarding import of live animals and animal parts will go a long way in keeping us CWD free. There's always the possibility CWD can sneak in, but chances are greatly reduced if it's not introduced through a human-assisted pathway.

Last, but certainly not least, is the issue of mountain lions in North Dakota. We garnered a great deal of information from the first experimental hunting season in 2005-06. We know we have a resident cougar population in North Dakota. Theoretically, we know what the population could be, based on available habitat. But that doesn't mean we have all the information yet. We will again recommend a similar mountain lion season for 2006-07. There will be some modifications to the season, which I believe are reasonable and responsible. There is so much more to learn about mountain lions in North Dakota, and we're trying to do it in a responsible yet economical manner. I think we're accomplishing that.

There's a lot to look forward to for those who enjoy the outdoors. While we're a little low on moisture in some areas of the state, there looks to be abundant fish and wildlife for all to enjoy. I encourage all of you to go out and enjoy these wonders with your family, friends, or simply by yourself. There's no better place to do this than North Dakota.

Terry Steinwand